

**SAFETY IN NUMBERS:  
IMPROVING THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS' SECURITY CLIMATE  
THROUGH THE CONTROL AND TRANSMISSION OF INFORMATION**

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# ABSTRACT

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**Title:** Safety in Numbers: Improving The University of Texas' Security Climate Through the Control and Transmission of Information

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Campus safety and security is a concern that challenges colleges across the country. This is true also for The University of Texas at Austin (UT Austin). With two recent homicides, a growing awareness of rampant sexual assault, and the political polarization of the student body, the dialogue surrounding UT Austin and its safety environment has become especially urgent and energetic. Interview with campus administrators suggested that one of the most effective ways to create a secure student body is to educate its constituents so that they can make informed decisions about their safety. The purpose of this study was to investigate ways that UT Austin can enhance its ability to create that informed community.

The topic was divided into three categories, information, communication, and transparency that were analyzed individually. The first section investigates what information UT Austin is disseminating, how the data are formatted, how the information is contextualized, and what data are often inaccessible to the public. Delaying or withholding information degrades administrative transparency, which can erode student feelings of safety. The final section investigates ways that the University improve that relationship through performance analysis and feedback solicitation.

To conduct this analysis, research on campus safety and security from 2000 to 2017 and interviews with campus administrators were synthesized along with a dataset comparing twenty

peer institutions across a series of performance metrics. The results indicate that UT Austin currently has substantial growth potential in regards to its safety environment, and the study concludes by suggesting recommendations for the University that include publishing crime data in more open formats, increasing student involvement in campus security, streamlining and formatting online resources, and ensuring the recency of security information.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As an engineering student who had never individually written a report longer than 15 pages, this project was a daunting task that generated months of missed deadlines, late nights, and intense stress. My survival was ultimately dependent on the involvement of numerous contributors and I'd like to acknowledge them here.

My first thanks are due to Dr. Richard Reddick and the Plan II program for giving me the tools to accomplish such a large feat and continuing to support the pursuit of my passion, even when success seemed questionable.

Next I'd like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Michael Webber, who volunteered to guide a project outside of his expertise and whose advice kept this project grounded. Dr. Webber is himself a Plan II / Engineering graduate, which made this collaboration even more meaningful.

Just as crucial to my work was the support of my second reader, Dr. Audrey Sorrells, who believed in the value of my work even when I had my own doubts, and whose positive reinforcement inspired me to push through the frequent roadblocks.

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Finally, I want to both apologize to and thank all of my friends and family for suffering through this process with me. My friends Trevor and Andres and my dad Durbin, absorbed the brunt of my stress especially, yet managed to keep me energized and committed.

This thesis might be my writing, but it has the fingerprints of so many others all over it, so thank you everyone!

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# INTRODUCTION

On April 3, 2016, the University of Texas at Austin community was rocked when freshman Haruka Weiser became the first victim of an on-campus homicide since 1966. Despite immediate measures taken by the University and the City of Austin to improve security at the school, the unthinkable happened just over a year later when sophomore Harrison Brown was killed on May 1, 2017. Despite being one of the safest universities of its size in the country, these two events justifiably changed student perceptions of their personal security, and one year later, the ramifications from those two events are still being felt.

As a student at UT Austin since 2014, I have not only witnessed these changes in student behavior, but have experienced its effects on my physical and psychological wellbeing firsthand. I've also noticed that while the two senseless deaths captured national attention and sparked drastic change, this school is also dealing with systemic issues like sexual assault that threaten student safety just as much. It was this environment that inspired me to pursue research focused on UT Austin's security infrastructure and how to improve it.

Unsurprisingly, this is a complex and nuanced topic that occupies significant attention from some of the greatest minds on campus. The analysis presented in the following pages can paint the University in a negative light, but one of the primary takeaways from the research process was that school administration is pouring immense amounts of energy, passion, and resources into improving campus security, and from an objective viewpoint, and consequently generate positive results. That being said, there is an immense amount of improvement potential that can still be realized, and school administrators need to continue evaluating their performance and making changes in the way they control and transmit information about criminal activity and security resources at UT Austin.



This study begins by establishing the recent history of crime at US colleges and their failure to meet the public demand for more crime information. The effects of security violations on student health are also explained and that is related to the current environment on UT Austin's campus. The following chapter describes the exploration of the hypothesis that technology is the best way to improve security at UT Austin, then outlines how that theory was replaced with the concept of creating an informed community. From there, the central theme of the informed community is broken into three component parts, information, communication, and transparency, and research is introduced to analyze each one separately. Finally, the results are compiled to evaluate UT Austin's performance holistically before offering a series of recommendations for future development.

Since this is a relatively new area of study, this work is not intended as a call for specific action, but rather to establish a basis for campus security standards across the country and a need for improvement. From there, the results can inspire introspection and guide change to ultimately contribute to the creation of a safer campus community.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO COLLEGE CRIME

Jeanne Clery was never supposed to attend Lehigh University. Two of her brothers had graduated from Tulane University in New Orleans, both of her parents served on the parent's council there, and for most of high school, Jeanne had considered Tulane her dream school. After hearing about the murder of freshman student Karin Minkin at the school in 1984 however, Jeanne's parents panicked and begged her to stay closer to home. After considering local options, Lehigh seemed like a good fit. By the night of April 5, 1986, Jeanne was nearing the end of her freshman year and was asleep in her dorm, Stoughton Hall. Joseph Henry, another Lehigh student, had lost an election on campus that day, so he got intoxicated to numb the pain. Drunk and irritable, he wandered into, then through, Stoughton Hall by means of several doors that had been welcomingly propped open with pizza boxes for students from other dorms to enter. Finally, he slipped into Jeanne's room with the intent of stealing something to sate his frustration, but when she woke and surprised him, he snapped. He then proceeded to beat her, rape her, and strangle her in her own bed. It was the 38th violent crime at Lehigh in three years.<sup>1</sup>

### The History of Crime at US Universities

When Jeanne Clery was murdered in 1986, most American universities did not keep any sort of crime statistics, and those that did rarely published them.<sup>2</sup> From a public relations standpoint, it seemed foolish to them. Why publish information that could negatively impact potential students' perception of the university, ultimately damaging application rates? Consequently, students were forced to make decisions about their future home for the next four years without the ability to properly consider their personal safety in the decision.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Beyette, 1989

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

Clery's parents ultimately sued Lehigh for \$25 million, "charging negligence and alleging that the university had been aware of the practice of door propping, that the security situation on campus had been misrepresented in Jeanne's housing contract and that the administration knew Henry to be violent and abusive."<sup>4</sup> When both parties settled for an undisclosed amount, the family used the money to fund lobbying efforts in Washington that ultimately led to the creation of the Jeanne Clery Act. The legislation established a set of standards for crime statistic record keeping and reporting that were required for any university accepting federal funding. In its current state, the legislation requires that universities define geography regarding both their campuses and the nearby surrounding area that serves students. Universities must record, categorize, and disclose any crime that happens within that area using both a daily crime log as well as an annual crime report. The other significant stipulation of the act requires that colleges issue timely warnings about crimes that pose a serious or continuing threat to student safety.<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps the most important result of the Clery Act is that it established an obligation for universities to inform and protect their students in a manner that is constantly being adjusted and refined as the dialogue regarding security also changes. That obligation becomes more urgent every time incidents like the Virginia Tech shooting or the child abuse scandal at Penn State highlight deficiencies in modern security infrastructure.<sup>67</sup> Despite the grim narratives often circulated by the media however, college security has, for the most part, undergone significant improvement in the last thirty years. In 2001, the FBI, using Clery data, reported that the average American university experienced almost 36 crimes on campus per 10,000 students. Just 13 years

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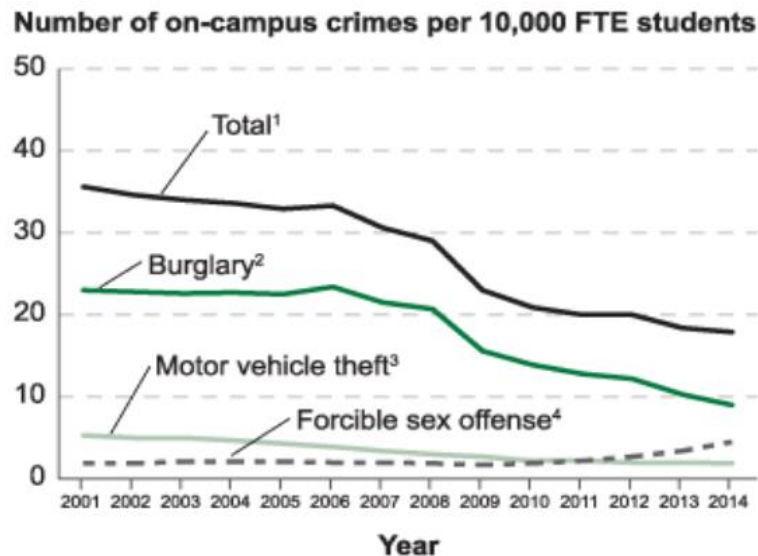
<sup>4</sup> Beyette, 1989

<sup>5</sup> Jeanne Clery Act, 1990 (U.S.)

<sup>6</sup> Hamp, 2018

<sup>7</sup> Hobson, 2018

later, that number has dropped by 44% to just under 19 crimes per 10,000 (Figure 1).<sup>8</sup> Some of that drop is partially attributable to improvements in technology, but is also supported by new educational and support programs such as the popular safe walk programs appearing at most schools.



**Figure 1:** *On-campus crime trends since 2001. Since then, total crime has been on the decline, but sexual offenses have actually increased.*<sup>9</sup>

Despite these marked improvements, security still remains an issue at colleges and universities. For example, during the same time period that overall crime decreased by 44%, “reports of sexual assault rose 52%, drug-law violations more than doubled and liquor-law violations rose 52%.”<sup>10</sup> Complicating the dialogue further is the introduction of new concerns such as inclusion or mental health, and their impact on campus climates. The Clery Act set a vital precedent that has directly led to important results, but universities still have a lot of improvement potential to fully meet their obligation to student safety.

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<sup>8</sup> College Crime, 2017

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Winn, 2017

### UT Austin's Campus Climate

During the same time period since 2001, the University of Texas at Austin has experienced positive security results very similar to the national average: in 2014, the university reported 476 credible crimes during the year, which represented a 39% decrease from the 781 reports in 1999.<sup>11 12</sup> A dearth of detailed data makes it difficult to determine whether the improvements are mostly attributable to new technology, better trained staff, student awareness, or other factors, but it's probably safe to assume that the combination of these initiatives ultimately facilitated the change. Regardless, these improvements have directly benefited the university by ameliorating the safety concerns of current students and improving its reputation in the eyes of prospective students.

Security and safety are difficult concepts to define however, because they can be interpreted differently depending on the interested party, and they are also constantly evolving to encompass new meanings. Merriam-Webster defines security as “the state of being free from danger or threat” and further clarifies it to include “feeling safe, stable, and free from fear and anxiety.”<sup>13</sup> The first definition is more colloquial because most people generally agree that good security requires a physical state of safety from tangible threats such as robbery or assault. The second definition tends to receive less consensus however, because it claims that security includes a *feeling* of safety. The first is a binary condition: either you're safe or you are not. The second is a perception, something that can vary from person to person. Despite the apparent subjectivity, there is a plethora of research asserting that perceived fear can add stress to an individual's life, thereby affecting both their mental and physical health. For example, a 2013

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<sup>11</sup> 2000 Annual Security and Fire Safety Report, 2000

<sup>12</sup> 2015 Annual Security and Fire Safety Report, 2015

<sup>13</sup> Security, 2017

survey of almost 9,000 New Zealanders demonstrated that “fear of crime was found to be negatively and significantly associated with mental well-being across all models.”<sup>14</sup> Based on Pearson’s statistical analysis, the survey results indicated that fear of crime has a stronger long term influence on stress levels than factors such as employment status, partner status, or income.<sup>15</sup> Studies focused on students specifically found that “prolonged and severe stress may be psychologically damaging in that it may hinder a person’s ability to engage in effective behavior,” and one study on African American students even found that “racial and ethnic-related stressors were the strongest predictors of perceived stress, over and above gender, age, and SAT scores.”<sup>16 17</sup> Based on the literature, the perception based definition of security is valid, and should therefore be taken just as seriously as physical threats. An important clarification is that based on their definitions, the terms ‘safety’ and ‘security’ are usually interchangeable, and will be used as such throughout the extent of this paper.

Because fear or anxiety can affect security on a campus by altering feelings of safety, universities should be invested in targeting those perceptions in addition to deterring physical crime. Unfortunately, it’s much more difficult to gauge the campus climate than to track crime statistics, making it tough to evaluate a university’s performance in that regard. Based on the opinions of numerous campus administrators, one of the most effective methods of quantifying the campus environment is feedback from students through personal interactions, surveys, or even reviewing social media, but because of the relative recency of this area of research however, data about this topic is scarce.<sup>18 19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Pearson & Breetzke, 2014

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Murff, 2005

<sup>17</sup> Greer, 2008

<sup>18</sup> Garrard, 2018

<sup>19</sup> Martinez, 2018

UT Austin's progress in deterring physical crime was established previously through Clery data, but to fully evaluate its security performance, the campus climate must also be evaluated. In lieu of quantitative data, a review of student media over the last three years is a substitute for gauging that climate. The following headlines and quotes are sampled from a survey of Daily Texan articles published since 2016, but are by no means comprehensive:

**UT's Lack of Transparency Fails Students**

"The university erodes their presentation of a zero-tolerance policy when it comes to violence and misconduct when they fail to listen to the overwhelming support for firing violent offenders." - February 16, 2018<sup>20</sup>

**It's Time for the University to Listen to Students, Not Acts of Racism**

"So, why does it take a grand display of violence hundreds of miles away to validate the discrimination faced by UT students?" - August 27, 2017<sup>21</sup>

**Students Express Campus Safety Concerns During Discussion**

"Students raised questions regarding lighting on campus, safe transportation from campus to their residences and the homeless population in West Campus during a campus discussion Wednesday afternoon." - April 20, 2016<sup>22</sup>

**UT's Racist Past, Present Leaves Students of Color Vulnerable**

"Early Saturday morning, a neo-Nazi rally by the group Patriot Front took place on the South Mall, an area highly frequented by students at the University of Texas at Austin. On Monday, students returned to class as usual and walked past the area of the rally. Although the individuals may no longer be on campus, students of color will remember this incident for days and weeks to come." - November 9, 2017<sup>23</sup>

This survey is not intended to imply that the University is failing in its obligation to protect its students because there is no data to back that assertion. Rather, the evidence presented is meant to reveal a perception of fear or anxiety that appears to exist within the campus environment recently. While some of the concerns represent a specific ethnic group or gender, plenty more reveal feelings of insecurity shared ubiquitously by students.

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<sup>20</sup> Severe, 2018

<sup>21</sup> Campbell, 2017

<sup>22</sup> Lew, 2016

<sup>23</sup> McMorris & Zoya, 2017

The UT Austin Campus Safety and Security Committee states on its website that its vision is that “The University of Texas at Austin will be recognized as a national leader for campus safety and security operations (planning, policies, procedures, and practices) for a university.”<sup>24</sup> A brief online search reveals that, while security practices at UT Austin outclass the national average, it is by no means considered a leader in the field.<sup>25</sup> <sup>26</sup> Combined with the student feelings regarding safety, it is clear that there is a discrepancy between UT Austin’s stated vision for security and the perceptions of its performance, both publicly and on-campus. This inconsistency inspired the motivation for this research project, which seeks to answer the following question: what initiative should the University of Texas at Austin pursue to create the most improvement in perceptions of on-campus security? Based on the presentation of research, by targeting perceptions, the University can thereby improve its tangible security.

#### Motivation for this Research

Before delving into the intricacies of the topic, it is first necessary to establish why this subject matters to the parties involved. Students at the university have a right to pursue their academic endeavors at UT Austin without having to account for or compensate for the fear and anxiety that result from security threats. Regardless of the prevalence of crime on a campus, negative perceptions can still create those feelings, so it is the university’s obligation to alleviate those concerns as much as possible. While accomplishing that goal in a complex environment is a difficult task, it directly benefits the university by empowering its students to achieve more when free from the mental stress associated with security fears.

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<sup>24</sup> Campus Safety and Security, 2018

<sup>25</sup> College Campus Safety Rankings, 2016

<sup>26</sup> Top 100 Safest Colleges in America, 2017



A safe student body is also accompanied by several indirect advantages. For example, when students feel threatened, they apply pressure to university administration as demonstrated by the Daily Texan articles. When that criticism is relieved through effective security, administration can apply those resources to other initiatives. Similarly, when students do not feel the pressure of safety, they have the flexibility to tackle other perceived problems on campus, making the University a better environment for current and incoming students. Yet another result of improved security is that the student body affords the school more trust and leeway in future critical situations, making it easier for campus police and safety workers to execute their duties. Finally, there is a financial incentive for the University because improved security could lead to less litigation.

Another potential benefit is an improvement in public relations. Campus safety has been a popular topic in national discourse for the last twenty years, and gains more exposure every time a new scandal or security breach rocks a community. By creating a secure on-campus environment, the university can project that perception through both personal and public channels, ultimately giving it a competitive advantage over peer universities and making it more appealing to potential students.

Based on the data presented, the University of Texas at Austin needs to continue improving its security infrastructure to meet its obligation to its students as well as approaching the vision it has set for itself. There are several tangible benefits associated with the changes as well, making it clear that it is in the university's best interest to pursue better security.

## CHAPTER 2: INFORMED COMMUNITY

### Response to Crime

When increases in the frequency or seriousness of criminal activity start to impact the behavior of a community, there is always a call for changes meant to curb the trend and increase safety. For example, actions in the year following the mass shooting at Virginia Tech (VT) included “installing centrally monitored video cameras, implementing the VT Alerts system, altering the hardware on academic building entrances, placing message boards in high profile areas and a better emergency preparedness plan.”<sup>27</sup> Similarly, in the wake of a 57% increase in homicides in 2016, the city of Chicago has undertaken “an expansion of technology based initiatives” that include analyzing data to inform hot spot policing and optimizing police response time.<sup>28 29</sup> Based on these examples and others, the changes demanded by the public in the wake of threatening criminal activity tend to reactively target criminal behavior through the application of new technologies. This pattern is understandable since security organizations often fail to incorporate new technological innovations into their infrastructure, so when change is called for, that is the application with the highest added value.

Following two sensational homicides and increased publicization of sexual assault on campus in the last several years, the UT Austin community has responded in a similar manner to Virginia Tech and the city of Chicago. According to the BeSafe webpage, changes implemented by campus police and administration have included increased patrols, increased lighting, reducing vegetation, installing new security systems in buildings, increased monitoring of social

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<sup>27</sup> Fleming, 2008

<sup>28</sup> Sweeney, Schmadeke, & Meisner, 2017

<sup>29</sup> Hinton, 2017

media channels, and an update to campus alert measures.<sup>30</sup> Following a Department of Public Safety survey of the entire campus, more upgrades to aging components of the security infrastructure are in the works with the aim of gaining more control over student safety.

Based on this pattern of reactionary investment in technology, this research initially sought to assess the feasibility of improving security at UT Austin through the introduction of new automation techniques. Specifically focused on increasing the capabilities of the SURE Walk program, a student escort service, three applications of automation, ranging from low impact but easy to implement solutions, such as apps, to more complex and higher impact technologies like drones were chosen. To assess the feasibility of each solution, interviews were scheduled with numerous administrators including:

***Table 1:*** List of interviews conducted to assess technological solution feasibility.

Carlos Martinez	President’s Chief of Staff
David Carter	Chief of Campus Police
Bobby Stone	Director of Parking and Transportation
Jimmy Johnson	Director of Campus Safety and Security
John Salsman	Director of Environmental Health and Safety
Doug Garrard	Assoc. VP for Campus Life
Todd Humphreys	Professor in Aerospace Engineering
Holden Hopkins	Student Director of SURE Walk

During each interview, subjects were asked to provide their assessment on the state of campus security based on their experience with the school. These discussions ranged from monitoring student perceptions to explaining the next initiative in the pipeline among other related topics. Interviewees were then presented with the three technology applications and asked to analyze them within the context of the current campus environment. Finally, each subject was asked to respond to the question “if you could change or upgrade one element of campus security

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<sup>30</sup> BeSafe Campaign, 2018

to create the most improvement, what would it be?” Ultimately, the information received from these interviews revealed some interesting insight into campus administration and dramatically shifted the subject of this research.

### Findings from Preliminary Interviews

One of the immediate insights gleaned from the interviews was how many parties are involved in the security conversation. For example, the Campus Safety and Security Committee has representation from all of the following groups:

***Table 2: Campus Safety and Security Committee Members.<sup>31</sup>***

Campus Safety and Security Committee		
President’s Office	Provost’s Office	Legal Affairs
UTPD	Student Affairs	Dean of Students
Human Resource	Communications	Health Services
Env. Health and Safety	Information Technology	Facilities
Athletics	Housing and Food	Registrar
	Libraries	

By including so many groups in a single committee, administration is able to take advantage of the diversity and experience available at the university to solicit new ideas and inputs. Even more importantly, any decision made by the committee has to filter through consideration by each member group, meaning that those actions and their consequences to different components of the campus environment are well thought out. One of the inherent disadvantages to this approach however, is that the approval process can be convoluted and slow, bogged down by one or two dissenting voices. The representatives of the legal and communications departments are especially difficult to appease because of the sensitive nature of their positions. The legal team has to protect the university from litigation by balancing

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<sup>31</sup> Campus Safety and Security Committee, 2018

competing obligations while the communication team is constantly tailoring the public image of the university and consequently evaluates each action through the lenses of external parties.

Another significant insight from the interviews was that UT Austin administration is doing an admirable job at considering and evaluating new technologies for security applications. Buoyed by the findings of a recent Department of Public Safety survey, numerous initiatives are currently in development, and many others have been shelved due to feasibility challenges. For example, two of the technologies originally proposed by this research were crowd sourced safety apps and drone escorts. Based on extensive research conducted by the university, apps are not feasible yet because access to telephone networks and Wi-Fi on campus is not ubiquitous enough to support reliance on apps. Another consideration is that apps rarely provide enough information to adequately mobilize emergency personnel, meaning that they could be a resource drain. As for drones, existing FAA flight restrictions currently restrict flight during certain times and at certain altitudes which apply to the university as well as private pilots. Several interviewees also expressed concerns regarding the weaponization of drones by malicious third parties. In short, the security infrastructure already in place is doing a sufficient job at finding and assessing new technologies in order to keep the university as safe as possible.

As it became clear that the biggest improvement to campus security was not through technology, another theme started to emerge from the interviews. When asked the question about improving security with a single change, several individuals alluded to the same idea: creating an informed community. Essentially, they asserted that there is a set of knowledge and behaviors that, when implemented by students, can significantly mitigate the prevalence of security threats. An example of this informed community concept would be students learning to take their headphones out as they walk home at night or overcome the stigma of reporting crimes to 911.

The idea of actors within a community investing in their own security rather than relying on the performance of the governing body is a rather new subject of academic research. A seminal publication by Daniel Goldstein in 2010 called for an anthropological exploration into “the multiple ways in which security is configured and deployed - not only by states and authorized speakers, but by communities, groups, and individuals - in their engagements with other local actors and with arms of the state itself.”<sup>32</sup> This does not remove the obligation of providing safety from authorities, but rather calls for them to contribute resources to educating their constituent base. “In a nutshell, for securitization to be successful, the securitizing actor needs to convince a specific audience of the urgency of a threat.”<sup>33</sup> UT Austin currently invests in numerous educational practices dedicated towards educating students about safe behaviors and the resources available to them when their safety is compromised. Based on the perceptions of fear that remain on campus established previously, it is clear that the creation of an informed community remains one of the biggest areas of improvement for security on campus.

### Informed Community

To explore the creation of an informed community and its position within the larger conversation of securitization on campus, I investigated three critical components: control of information, channels and modes of communication, and transparency with students. These components were chosen based on the ways that several interviewees chose to categorize their security dialogue.<sup>34 35 36</sup> Each component required an assessment of both university and student needs, then had to be synthesized with cutting edge research to ultimately inform a series of actionable recommendations within the subject. Since research focused on agent/actor security

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<sup>32</sup> Goldstein, 2016

<sup>33</sup> Schwell, 2015

<sup>34</sup> Carter D. , 2018

<sup>35</sup> Rahman, 2018

<sup>36</sup> Martinez, Interview with UT's Chief of Staff, 2018

relationships and security environments on college campuses are both rather recent undertakings, many of the justifications for recommendations are supported by opinions or perceptions expressed by subjects interviewed for this project rather than quantifiable data. Throughout this analysis, it was important for the researcher to keep in mind that while students are often single-mindedly focused on their own feelings of safety, the university must keep in mind a bevy of conflicting interests including legal concerns, public relations, student safety, intellectual freedom, etc., and this research sought to offer another perspective to consider in addition to those that have a voice on the committee already.

The first component of an informed community is the control of information regarding crime and security. From the university's standpoint, there are laws regarding data it must release that have to be balanced with other regulation controlling what cannot be released. These conflicting obligations often tie up so many resources just to maintain balance that it can be difficult to adequately assess what else can be done with the information, so a survey of information at other schools we be conducted to inform the university on additional data that should be made accessible for students' benefit. Another criteria of useful information is that it must be kept up to date, and the variety of sources offered by UT Austin will be evaluated through this perspective. Finally, data accessibility is an important prerequisite for research and evaluation, so suggestions are presented on how to improve those offerings while meeting the necessary privacy requirements. By analyzing all of these factors, the university can increase its transparency while still achieving its legal and public relations obligations.

Information is ineffective if it is not communicated properly, so the second area of research will assess the channels of communication that currently exist between UT Austin's security personnel and the student body and how effective they are. Questions raised in this

section begin with how campus safety entities prioritize and present information through their virtual platforms. Student attention spans are notoriously limited, so by giving certain resources the spotlight, they can impact where that attention is directed most. Another crucial consideration is how the information presented. Messages need to be dependent on their receiver, so by evaluating the effectiveness of those transmissions, their effectiveness can be increased. A third area of interest is how the university utilizes and monitors social media, and whether it is taking advantage of the latest research to optimize those efforts. Finally, a new initiative in security infrastructure is virtual hubs that connect students to various resources depending on their specific need. All of the information captured through the first three topics can be leveraged to develop this new tool, thereby maximizing the impact on students.

The final area of research will gauge how the university maintains a transparent relationship with its students regarding the security environment. If UT Austin is serious about pioneering campus safety as a national leader, it must collect feedback from constituents regarding its myriad initiatives. Surveys and focus groups are two popular feedback channels that can help optimize the allocation of resources, but if they are not being used properly, they lose effectiveness. Additionally, perceptions and feelings are time sensitive, so it is important to constantly update and adjust with the changing attitudes. Another component of transparency is applying the information towards self-evaluation. While every department at the university engages in these exercises, they rarely make the results public. This choice sometimes creates a rift between students and administration as the former loses perspective on the latter. Understanding what information is valuable to students can mitigate that concern. A final component of transparency is comparison with peer institutions. Again, most entities at the school actively compare their performance with other universities, it is rare to see published



results. Most of the information necessary to compare the security statistics at different schools is already available on the web, so it does not take much additional effort to share those comparisons. Since UT Austin already performs favorably in the majority of those comparisons, sharing that information would be beneficial. By taking all of these factors into account, the university can more effectively evaluate and improve its services to students.

This study concludes by summarizing the findings from each topic and synthesizing them into a single, consistent set of recommendations that the university can review and implement to improve the climate of security on campus. The suggestions will subsequently be extrapolated and applied to institutions similar to UT Austin to assess their potential outside of the specific Longhorn environment. Finally, recommendations for future research will be made to continue building on the results of this work.

### Methodology

The starting point for analyzing each component of an informed community was conducting a review of the academic research available on the subject. For example, most of the literature examined for the transparency section was acquired through a survey of public administration studies. Oftentimes, a seminal paper would lead to more targeted work that would ultimately create a foundation for that topic. It is important to note that the study of informed communities is a relatively new field, and it was therefore very difficult to find information specifically related to college campuses.

Once a baseline had been established, it was then supplemented with data from peer institutions that generated a standard to compare UT Austin against. The sample set of other schools was a combination of colleges that UT Austin identifies and publishes themselves and schools that have been identified as possessing exceptional security infrastructure. This blend

ensured that the data being collected represented the highest standards in the country but were also implemented by schools with similar makeups to UT Austin. The following table shows what colleges were surveyed and how they rank in regards to security performance.

School	Security Rank	School	Security Rank
Arizona State University	39	University of North Carolina	36
University of California, Berkeley	31	Ohio State University	
University of Florida	24	Pennsylvania State University	
University of Georgia	21	Purdue University	18
University of Houston	27	Texas A&M University	
University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign	1	University of California, San Diego	
University of Indiana		University of California, Los Angeles	22
University of Michigan	8	University of Virginia	
Michigan State University		University of Washington	2
University of Minnesota	10	University of Wisconsin	3

**Table 3:** *List of universities and their respective security rankings that were used to establish a sense of national standards.*

To compare the performance of each university, a series of metrics were created to test a component of each category studied: information, communication, and transparency. For each school, the police department website was surveyed for each of the metrics, followed by any websites that appeared from using the search term “[university name] safety.” Finally, the social media accounts of each police department were analyzed and added to the data set. Once the results were compiled, they were used to gauge the prevalence of certain tools or behaviors. This method was very effective for the information section because those metrics were very easy to quantify, but the communication and transparency were more qualitative, so the data was used to generate inspiration and examples in lieu of numeric analysis.

The final component of the research that informed this research was a series of interviews conducted with students and administrators at the University of Texas at Austin. In addition to the staff listed previously in this chapter, subsequent interviews were conducted with student leaders such as Mehrnaz Rahman, Student Body Vice President, or Isaiah Carter, former Student

Body Chief of Staff, to gauge the perceptions and sentiments of the constituents of the University. Most of the interviewees tended to agree with the importance of an informed community and expressed the need for further evaluation and improvement of the current infrastructure. Administrators were often receptive to, but reserved about, considering recommendations because new initiatives undergo an intense amount of scrutiny before entering the pipeline. Conversations with students frequently focused on transparency and communication with administration. Oftentimes, the interviewee would question a specific choice, but when the rationale for that decision was explained, a common understanding was not difficult to reach, indicating that improving transparency can significantly enhance satisfaction with security infrastructure, and consequently, feelings of safety. All of these interviews were also used to help ascertain UT Austin's performance in the metrics described previously to compare it to the national standard.

## CHAPTER 3: INFORMATION

The first component of creating an informed community is making information both accessible and interpretable, but before a US college can make anything publicly available, it must do so within the guidelines Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). The legislation, signed in 1974, prohibits the release of a student's educational records to the public without the written consent of the individual in question. These records can range from personal information to grade reports to disciplinary records. In regards to crime, the law is used, often controversially, to protect school judicial records from access by the media. "Citing concerns for the privacy interests of students, higher education institutions are often unwilling to release information that may directly identify students, especially victims and witnesses of crimes."<sup>37</sup> In doing so, the schools protect the established rights of the individual, but can also shield themselves from the prying eyes of the media.

The lawsuit following Jeanne Clery's murder established however, that this type of willful withholding of information can be detrimental to student safety, and in the subsequent years, several pieces of legislation were enacted or expanded to create exceptions to the guidelines of FERPA. Chief among these are the Clery Act, which mandates that universities publish a variety of crime related information annually, and Title IX, which requires that universities respond to and report gender related crimes regardless of their status in the legal system. Both of these laws are intended to educate the public about criminal activity on college campuses based on the assumption that students have a right to access the information.

A final consideration that universities must make in regards to information release is how it will impact the current security environment. For example, it might be useful for most students

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<sup>37</sup> Walton, 2002

to know what areas of a campus are subject to camera surveillance, but by making that information public, potential criminals can use it to their advantage, thereby creating a larger threat to students. From numerous interviews with administrative members at the University of Texas at Austin, it became clear that protecting information sensitive to security operations is a high priority, but it is also a somewhat ambiguous criteria. This author was denied access to meetings and data because of it might have a “chilling effect on the discussion [of sensitive or confidential information],”<sup>38</sup> but at the same time administrators acknowledged that standards of what should be available are changing and that they’re constantly pushing the boundaries of what they’re comfortable publishing.

Based on available research, universities should be releasing more information regarding crime than just what is required to meet their legal obligations. Recent evidence suggests that citizens should be “able to take data from all points along the criminal justice system in order to assess the impact of what we do with the criminal justice system, allowing us to find the programs and practices that create the best possible public outcomes.”<sup>39</sup> By making crime data available, universities can improve the effectiveness of their security while simultaneously increasing the transparency of their operations.

The Sunlight Foundation, an American nonprofit that advocates for “making government and politics more accountable and transparent”<sup>40</sup> has six recommendations for how to increase transparency through crime data that are as follows:

1. Mandate open formats, require public information to be posted online, remove restrictions for access, and remove restrictions on reuse of information.
2. Mandate ongoing data publications and updates and create a public, comprehensive list of all information holdings.

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<sup>38</sup> Martinez, Interview with UT's Chief of Staff, 2018

<sup>39</sup> Sibley, 2015

<sup>40</sup> About Us, 2018

3. Appropriately safeguard sensitive information.
4. Create permanent, lasting access to data.
5. Create processes to ensure data quality.
6. Provide definitions with data as to how crimes are defined.<sup>41</sup>

These recommendations are intended to “improve the openness of crime data and its availability to be reused and analyzed,” and many universities follow these guidelines in a manner that exceeds their legal obligations while still protecting sensitive information.<sup>42</sup> Some of these points, like safeguarding sensitive information or ensuring data quality are difficult to analyze without intimate involvement with a university’s legal and compliance departments, but the other four can be analyzed through observation of websites and social media. The following sections provide an assessment UT Austin’s performance regarding points one, two, four, and six through a set of metrics, then will evaluate a set of peer institutions with the same metrics to determine where UT Austin compares.

#### Access to Data

The first action posited by the Sunlight Foundation is to remove restrictions that prevent accessibility of crime data with the aim of helping constituents make informed decisions regarding their safety. As mentioned previously, several regulations govern what information is usually available on a university’s website, but there is still a bevy of information that, despite no legal restrictions, fails to reach the public. After surveying the 20 college sample set, it appears that UT Austin does a relatively poor job at keeping its constituent base informed.

One example of this restriction is the way that the university reports sex offenders employed by or enrolled at the institution. The Clery Act requires that schools provide the resources necessary to identify registered sex offenders on a college campus, such as public

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<sup>41</sup> Crime & Transparency, 2017

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

databases, but does not mandate that schools release the names of the criminals in question. Despite this, many schools across the country still choose to release the names of those individuals anyways for transparency purposes. While unconventional, 3 of the 20, or 15% of, the schools sampled make the identities of sex offenders in the campus environment public. This might seem like an insignificant number of colleges, but it is important for two reasons. First, it is clear that there are not any restrictions preventing the release of the information. Second, with the amount of attention and backlash that UT Austin is currently experiencing regarding sexual violence, transparency in this domain could help assuage some of the concerns.<sup>43</sup>

Another metric compared throughout the sample set was the amount of detail in campus crime logs. One of the requirements of the Clery Act, these daily logs must contain certain pieces of information such as the time of the report, the location, what category of crime the incident falls under, and the result. An example entry from the University of Washington<sup>44</sup> reads:

Incident Reported Date And Time	Incident Type	Incident Number	Incident Address	Common Name	Associated Case Number	Incident Occurred From Date and Time	Incident Occurred Through Date and Time	Disposition
04/11/2018 05:38:21	Trespass	2018-00014284	1911 NE SKAGIT LN	SMI, Smith Hall				HANDLED BY OFFICER

**Figure 2:** University of Washington crime log entry from 4/11/2018.<sup>45</sup>

Some things that are not required are identity of the perpetrator (student, faculty, or somebody not affiliated with the university), officer response time, specific actions taken by the officer, or what the perceived threat to students was. Similar to the sex offender information, only 3 of 20 peer institutions voluntarily supplement their crime logs with information that provides a better understanding of the incident, but the result is again significant because of the value that students can glean from them. Take this report for example, from UCLA<sup>46</sup>:

<sup>43</sup> Severe, 2018

<sup>44</sup> 60 Day Crime Log, 2018

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> UCPD Crime Alert, 2017

**8/31/2017**  
**On Campus Disorderly Conduct, Peeping**  
**UCLA Public Affairs Building**  
**(UCPD Advisory)**

**DATE REPORTED:** 8/30/2017

**SYNOPSIS:**

On 8/30/2017 at approximately 11:36 am, an unknown suspect held a gray iPhone under the door of the restroom stall when a female victim was inside. The victim yelled at the suspect, and the suspect fled the location in an unknown direction.

*Figure 3: UCLA crime log entry from 8/30/2017.<sup>47</sup>*

The additional information does not provide much more insight into the crime itself, but it gives students the awareness necessary to protect themselves from similar threats. It should be noted that this level of information is collected on a regular basis, so making it accessible to the public requires minimal additional effort.

A final set of information that can increase transparency is records of campus police department advisory committees or similar resources. These meetings can often cover sensitive material that make the resulting reports security threats, and consequently, the University of Florida was the only school surveyed that chose to release the information. The meetings only occur once a semester and the reporting documents are not very detailed, but they provide students with insight into the dialogue conducted by school administration, which then allows them to educatedly evaluate the corresponding results in regards to campus security.<sup>48</sup> Most universities do not feel comfortable releasing this level of information on a frequent basis, but the manner in which Florida does it might serve as a template for other schools to start pushing those limits a bit. Another alternative to this type of information release is self-reporting, which is analyzed more in chapter 4.

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<sup>47</sup> UCPD Crime Alert, 2017

<sup>48</sup> Meeting Archives, 2016



### Updated Publications

Another criteria of data transparency listed by the Sunlight Foundation is up to date information. Whether intended for education, reporting, or research, data loses effectiveness as it goes out of date, especially in environments that change as frequently as a college campus. In addition to news alerts that schools sometimes share, many publications required from colleges by Clery or Title IX share this condition, including documents like the annual Clery report or daily crime logs. Based on this research, the University of Texas at Austin does a very poor job of maintaining updated information, which is its ability to empower an informed community.

News updates are relatively common on the front pages of college police or safety websites. Whether it is major crime alerts or details of new initiatives or updates of the newest hire in the department, 58% percent of the surveyed institutions had an active news feed. Of those 11 schools, 9 of them had updates from March or April of this year. The UT Austin police department does not contain any sort of active news feed, but safety updates are a click away from the home page of the BeSafe website. Once users reach that webpage, they are presented with a feed that was last updated in May of 2017, almost a full year out of date.<sup>49</sup> While a news feed is not a requirement, it is a useful tool for keeping constituents informed on the security dialogue. More importantly, a new feed is nearly useless if it does not stay up to date, and that should be a priority for the university moving forward.

One of the Clery stipulations requires that “wherever crimes occur, campus police and public safety departments must maintain a daily crime log of all reported crimes that fall within their jurisdiction. This crime log must be made available to the public.”<sup>50</sup> Current technology makes updating daily crime logs a relatively simple process, and consequently, all 19 universities

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<sup>49</sup> Security & Safety Updates, 2018

<sup>50</sup> Summary of the Jeanne Clery Act, 2018

surveyed maintained records updated within the last three months. Even more notable, 68% of them posted entries to their crime logs in real time. In contrast, the most recent update in the crime log available on UTPD's website is from November, 2017 (at the time of this research).<sup>51</sup>

Crime logs are a crucial record, but the foundation of criminal reporting and the greatest repository of safety information at any university is the annual Fire and Safety Report published every October. With only one exception, every peer institution surveyed through this research had their 2017 report available and easy to find with labels like 'Clery Report' or 'Annual Safety Report'. The Clery Report available on the UTPD website is buried at the bottom of the 'Crime Statistics' page, but is not available through a broken link on the 'Records and Reports' page, making navigation a challenge. Most alarming however, is that the university has failed to update the report for almost seven months, meaning that the information in the available report is getting close to two years out of date. The 2017 report is available on the campus compliance website, but that site is difficult to find without a targeted google search. These oversights in the crime logs and the Clery Report are not only contradictory to the requirements of the Clery act, but are a dangerous omission of information that could potentially mislead students and jeopardize their mental and physical safety.

### Open Formats

While up to date information is necessary to maintain an informed student body, another important criteria is offering data in open formats for access and use. Open formatting enables the use of that information for research and analysis, which are crucial for performance evaluation and improvement. Another benefit of open formats is that it makes resources

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<sup>51</sup> Daily Crime Log, 2017

permanently available through downloads, meaning that constituents can access them whenever they're required.

One metric that was used to measure the availability of an institution's data was the format of daily crime logs. To maximize the usefulness of the information from a research perspective, the statistics need to be very quantifiable, have consistent data types, and download as a .csv or similar file type. Since the information is already publicly available, universities should not have to consider any additional adverse effects from offering the data in a more useful format. Despite that, only 10% of the sample institutions offer their statistics in an open format, with the other 16 schools and UT Austin providing the information through the standard pdf format. This inaccessibility is one of the contributing factors to the limited amount of research being conducted in this field despite the vast improvement potential that research offers.

A more direct benefit for students is being able to download resources such as active shooter guides or emergency phone numbers to their computers and phones for use in emergencies. Because of the vast disparity in the availability of these types of resources, a quantifiable metric measuring performance in this regard was difficult to generate, but regardless, several universities provide interesting reference materials. For example, the University of Stanford has a link to a printable wallet card containing important contact information available on their homepage.<sup>52</sup> Another useful tool is the campus crime map provided by several schools, including UC Berkeley and the University of Virginia.<sup>53</sup> <sup>54</sup> These resources are less useful than providing open data because they will likely attract a smaller audience, but their usefulness and ease of creation still make them worth considering, especially for UT Austin, which links notably few resources through their UTPD website.

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<sup>52</sup> Emergency Information Wallet Card, 2018

<sup>53</sup> Crime Mapping, 2018

<sup>54</sup> Public Facing Crime Map, 2018

## Contextualization

The final recommendation from the Sunlight Foundation is providing definitions as to how crimes are defined. One of the most common challenges with interpreting information or research is understanding the descriptions or jargon, so by adding this type of contextualization, to their crime reports, universities can take the burden of interpretation off of their students. Moreover, most of the additional information that could increase comprehension is already available on the web or at other schools so collating and presenting it is a relatively simple process.

Contextualization takes different forms at every university, but one constant among them is how they explain the annual Clery report. Every college is required to make the report available and their compliance departments usually include some legal statements indicating their adherence. For example, UT Austin introduces their annual report with the following text:<sup>55</sup>

### Clery Reports

The Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act Annual Security Reports are compiled and published by University Compliance Services. You may find the published annual security report [here](#).

If you have any questions regarding these reports, please contact [University Compliance Services](#) at 512-232-7055.

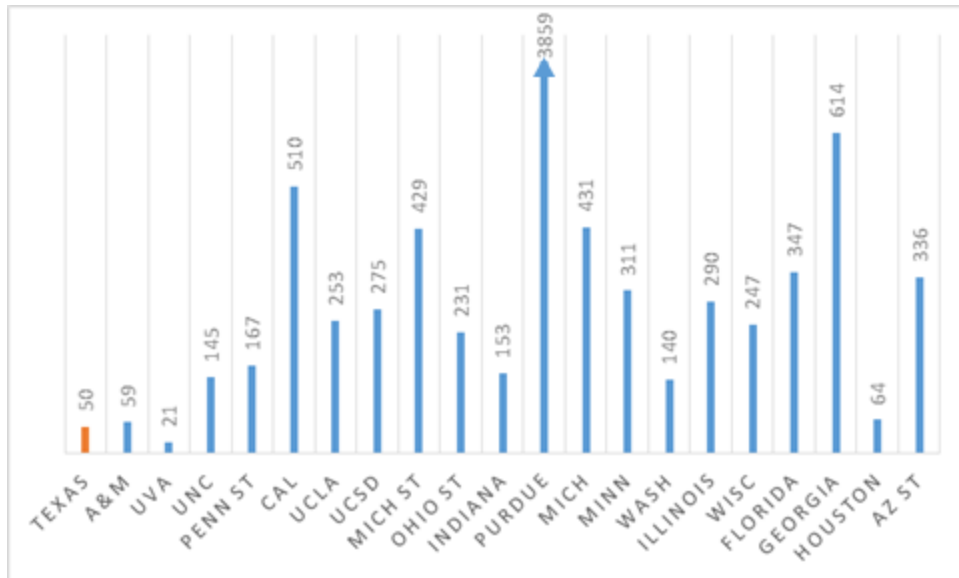
***Figure 4: Contextualizing information for the Clery Report on UT Austin's Police Department website.***<sup>56</sup>

The two paragraphs introducing the report contain 50 words. This number ranked 20th out of 21 institutions surveyed, and was 203 words short of the average Clery report webpage (excluding Purdue's whopping 3,859 explanation of the report).

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<sup>55</sup> Crime Statistics, 2018

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.



**Figure 5:** Number of words the survey schools use to contextualize the annual Clery report. The University of Texas at Austin is highlighted in orange.

Peer institutions across the country provide significantly more context to their security reporting, and their students are consequently more informed. It is difficult to quantitatively compare the explanations for other information sources like campus watch, etc., because, as explained previously, universities provide varying levels of access. Regardless, during the survey process, high levels of Clery report context seemed to qualitatively correlate with overall quality of information available on the website. Despite comparing poorly to other schools, UT Austin can make great strides in this metric with relatively low effort.

Two other tools that many universities incorporate into their online services are a dictionary of terms and a webpage explaining state laws. The dictionary of terms generally contains a list of common terms in the Clery report and campus crime logs that do not have obvious definitions. For example, Michigan State’s list indicates that the terms A&B and OUIL reference assault & battery and drunk driving respectively.<sup>57</sup> Seven of the survey schools currently utilize dictionaries.

<sup>57</sup> Clery Crime and Fire Log, 2018

State laws often dictate additional requirements to FERPA or Title IX but are much more difficult to locate because of their specificity. This challenge can prevent students and parents from understanding their rights regarding safety on their campus, so several universities have chosen to house pertinent state laws on a designated webpage and use that space to explain the nuances of the regulations. Six from the survey sample maintained this type of resource with varying levels of quality. UT Austin does not provide either of the aforementioned tools.

### Conclusions

The first step to creating an informed community is to provide the necessary information to constituents. Four criteria for effective information, access to data, updated publication, open formats, and context, were investigated throughout this chapter and regardless of the analysis, the University of Texas at Austin performed poorly in comparison to its peer institutions. Updating and contextualization were specific concerns, with the school barely meeting compliance standards for publishing the Clery report and ranking second to last in the word count metric. Targeted effort can create big improvements for these services because they are pretty obvious value-adds and most of the resources necessary for higher performance are readily available.

Improving the accessibility and format of UT Austin's crime statistics will be more difficult because there are potential consequences from adopting some of the measures other schools offer. For example, Professor Morrisett from the College of Pharmacy was recently driven to take his own life after student backlash over domestic violence charges dramatically impacted his reputation and quality of life.<sup>58</sup> The university has an obligation and vested interest in protecting its students and faculty from similar harm, but skeptics argue that had UT Austin been more transparent about Morrisett's past from the outset, the situation would not have

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<sup>58</sup> Lassmann, 2018

spiraled out of control. More access to information not only improves transparency, it stimulates research and dialogue on the subject, ultimately enabling the community to contribute and critique their environment. Information can then lead to activism and advocacy, eventually improving the security environment and making it safer for the constituent base.

## CHAPTER 4: COMMUNICATION

The importance of open and transparent information cannot be understated, especially when it comes to student safety, but to truly maximize its impact, it must be communicated efficiently and effectively to the end user. At the University of Texas at Austin, nearly all communication is created and transmitted within policy constraints established by the internal and external departments of communication. Similar to the filters that new information must pass through explained in the previous chapter, communication and media undergo scrutiny from both the legal and public relations lenses to ensure that they are representing the university accurately and as uncontroversially as possible to all possible on the receivers. All of these limitations ultimately create an understandably conservative environment and changing the status quo is often difficult. These challenges also mean that the most value can be added to security communication by adjusting the infrastructure and strategy rather than the actual content produced.

Consequently, this study broke communication into categories, website layout and social media strategy, that could be analyzed based on how they impacted students' abilities to receive or find safety information. In contrast to the previous chapter, these categories were very difficult to assess quantitatively, so most results were gathered by applying visual analysis founded on academic research. The same set of peer institutions was still used for comparison purposes, but instead of surveying each school's performance in certain metrics, they were used to find examples of effective communication strategies that could be adopted by UT Austin. Because of the qualitative nature of these findings, should they inspire a review of the communication methods employed by the school, more research would be required to assess the economic value of changes and the tangible impacts they could have on the students.



## Website Layout

Thanks to the ubiquitous nature of the internet, the modern college student is most likely to use a google search over other resources when confronted by uncertainty regarding or threats to their personal safety. Based on several test keywords, the two websites that appear for most web searches regarding campus security are the UT Austin police department's website and the school's Be Safe campaign website. Because these two sites potentially receive the most web traffic for security inquiries, they need to be designed to adequately address the user's needs in the most efficient manner possible.

A study by the University of Toledo posits that the two biggest factors affecting the user experience on a website are the navigational design and the visual design.<sup>59</sup> In this case, navigational design refers to how the website is organized and its ability to quickly guide a user to their end goal while visual design controls the user experience by attracting them to important content. Research on both of these topics is vast and sometimes even contradictory, but several recommendations appear consistently throughout the research.

For effective navigation, web designer, Andy Crestodina, recommends organizing the content of a webpage to take advantage of the primacy and recency effects.<sup>60</sup> By placing important links or information at the very top or bottom of the page, designers can take psychological biases into account and ensure that the most important items are receiving the most attention. Similarly, the website service, Weebly, suggests creating clear distinctions between links or buttons and not cluttering the site with too much text to avoid distracting users from the actual content.<sup>61</sup>

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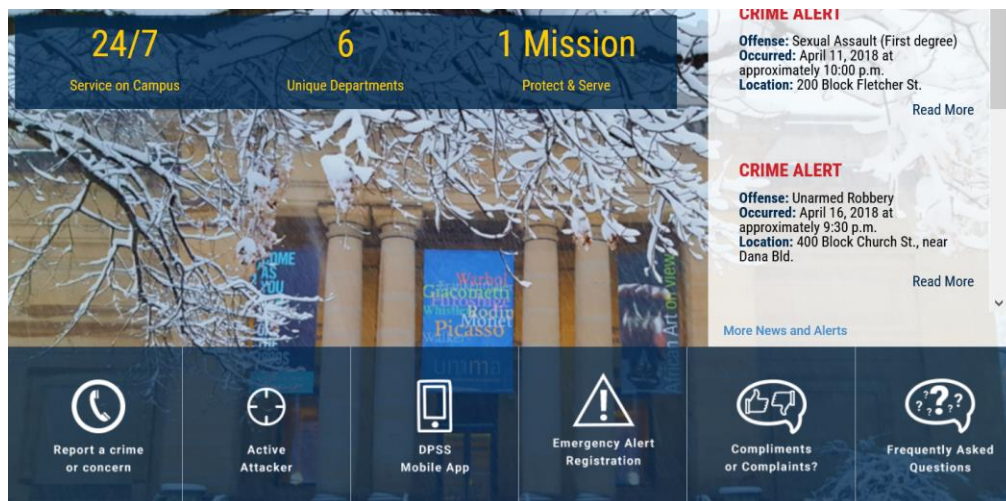
<sup>59</sup> Bassam, 2016

<sup>60</sup> Crestodina, 2016

<sup>61</sup> Barton, 2014

To enhance the navigational structure of a website, many developers recommend adding visual elements. Marketing firm, Enable, instructs users to create buttons or icons to distinguish services on a website. Another recommendation is to vary the size of visual elements to avoid boring the reader.<sup>62</sup> Yet a third visual technique proposed by the website design service, Wix.com, espouses the need for color contrast and consistency with fonts to ensure readability for the user.<sup>63</sup>

Several of the universities surveyed through the sample set implement most or all of these recommendations very effectively, creating an appealing and useful layout. Take the University of Michigan's police department website for example. While the newsfeed on the right side crowds things a little bit, notice the great use of icons and contrast along the bottom toolbar to guide users to several services. Prioritization is clearly important on this page as well, with only six of the seemingly most important services getting valuable space on the front page.



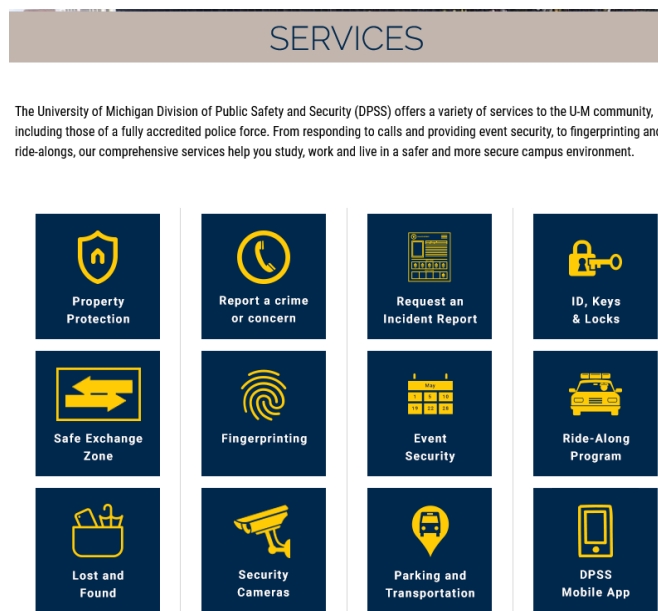
**Figure 6:** University of Michigan's Police Department home page.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>62</sup> De Souza, 2016

<sup>63</sup> Lepard, 2017

<sup>64</sup> Public Safety & Security, 2018

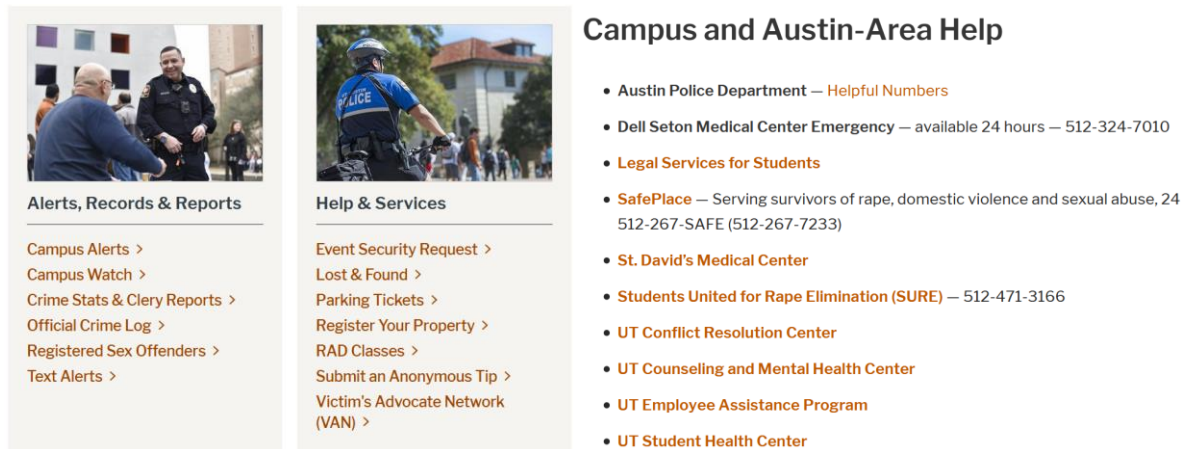
Similarly, the navigation page for all of their services minimizes the amount of text on the page while still providing enough instruction, then clearly delineates the specific services offered and reinforces them with icons.



**Figure 7:** *University of Michigan's Police Department services page.*<sup>65</sup>

By contrast, the following two pages from UT Austin's police department website offer a set of services similar those offered by Michigan, but they fail to guide the user to frequently seek services like SURE Walk or campus crime alerts. All of the text is the same size and no visual tools offer context for what the resource might actually offer. Ultimately, while the two websites offer similar content, the user experience is significantly worse on the UT Austin site because the navigational and visual design elements have not been optimized for the end user.

<sup>65</sup> Services, 2018



**Figure 8:** University of Texas at Austin’s Police Department’s services page (left) and BeSafe website services page (right).<sup>66</sup>

### Social Media Strategy

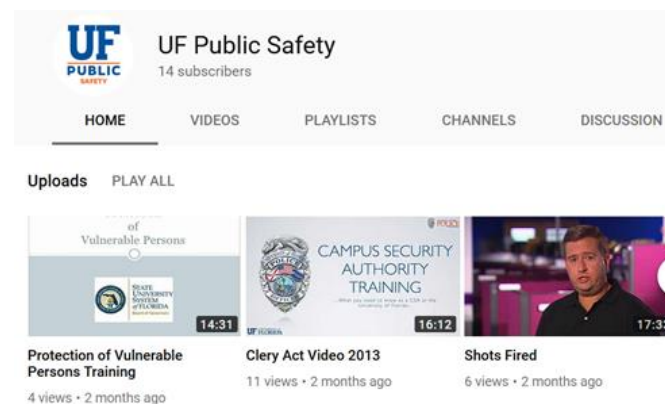
The second aspect of UT Austin’s communication plan that can improve campus safety is their social media plan. According to the Pew Research Center, 88% of 18 to 29 year olds currently interface with at least one form of social media, so it is clearly one of the best ways to connect with that demographic.<sup>67</sup> Thanks to an incredibly strong national brand, UT Austin already possesses one of the strongest social media presences in the country, and with more than 18,000 followers of the UT Austin police department’s twitter account, the school maintains that reach in terms of security outreach, ranking below only four other schools surveyed. The campus police department also maintains Facebook and Instagram accounts, giving them a presence on three of the top platforms. Maintaining a large network of followers does not necessarily translate to effective communication however, and based on new research, the university has several areas of growth that can improve its reach with students.

First among the new trends is what platforms students are using. At this point, nearly every university in the country has established some sort of presence on the major social media

<sup>66</sup> UT Police Department, 2018

<sup>67</sup> Smith & Anderson, 2018

platforms, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, and a high number of them have created profiles specifically for their police departments, including 95% of the institutions surveyed. Recently however, younger demographics have been expanding past the big three platforms, and in fact, Snapchat has become the most popular service, capturing 79% of potential users, with six out of every ten visiting the site at least once a day.<sup>68</sup> <sup>69</sup> Somewhat more surprising is that 94% of students use YouTube, the less traditional video sharing site. Some universities are taking advantage of this trend to keep their students informed about campus safety. For example, the University of Florida recently created a YouTube channel for public safety education videos.



**Figure 9:** University of Florida’s public safety YouTube channel showing three of their published videos.<sup>70</sup>

While it is a step in the right direction, the channel has even more potential to update students with recent safety news, educate them on crime mitigation, or respond to recent threats or trends.

Another commonly made mistake when it comes to social media is failing to customize messaging for the platform being used. Startup website Entrepreneur.com says that “every platform has its own audience. And each audience has their own expectations for the things they want to see on the platform – that can affect how well your social media posts perform,” before

<sup>68</sup> Reach of leading social media and networking sites used by teenagers and young adults in the United States as of February 2017, 2017

<sup>69</sup> Smith & Anderson, 2018

<sup>70</sup> UF Public Safety Channel, 2018

going on to list some of the most successful posts for each platform based on their analytics.<sup>71</sup> For example, Facebook is best used for sharing curated content like blogs as well as publicizing event while twitter is better for alerts and news.<sup>72</sup> The accounts for the UT Austin police and the BeSafe campaign engage in some customization of posts, but often the same content is being published through the different accounts.

Determining the kinds of content that resonates with users can be difficult, so the social media analytics developer Social Sprout recommends several ways to gauge interest. The first is to practice social listening, or paying attention to what consumers are talking about, specifically regarding your media.<sup>73</sup> From interviews with both UT Austin's Internal Communications Director and its Chief of Staff, the school spends a substantial amount of time on this to understand the student environment permeating campus. The other recommendation from Social sprout is to analyze the results of social media posts, specifically looking for the number of clicks, likes, replies, and retweets.<sup>74</sup> Again, based on interviews, it appears that the university frequently engages in analytics, but what appears to be missing is long term analysis. Statistics do not appear to be logged anywhere and the only historical data that can be accessed is from the platforms themselves. To fully optimize social media campaigns, UT Austin should work to incorporate long term analysis plans and infrastructure.

The final component to improving the online reach of the school's safety resources is finding innovative ways to share that information. Consistency is an important tenet of communication strategy, but it is easy to fall into the opposite trap of being too bland. Student interests are changing constantly, and to keep up, communication strategy needs to adjust

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<sup>71</sup> Lua, 2017

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Jackson, 2016

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

accordingly. One suggestion, again from Sprout Social, recommends that educational institutions employ student ambassadors to help run their outreach with the idea being that the students both know what is trendy at the moment and are passionate about reaching their peers.<sup>75</sup> Many universities are experimenting with this technique, like St. Mary's student takeovers on Snapchat.



**Figure 10:** Snapshot of a student takeover video from St. Mary's University.<sup>76</sup>

Student involvement would need to be monitored of course to ensure the quality of content, but many Longhorns, ranging from students in the School of Communications to the administrators of the Longhorn meme page, have the skills and passion required to enhance the social media atmosphere.

Social media might seem like an odd way to increase the safety of UT Austin's campus, but part of education is communication, and right now, social media is the way to communicate with students. By taking exploring the strategies outlined, both the UT Austin police department and the BeSafe campaign can reach more students with better messaging.

### Creating a Resource Hub

UT Austin offers a bevy of resources aimed at crisis prevention and response ranging from educational pamphlets on active shooter response to the behavior concerns advice line (BCAL), but to fully realize the potential of those tools, students have to be able to find them

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<sup>75</sup> Chen, 2018

<sup>76</sup> Rodriguez, 2017

when they're needed. The primary purpose of improving a website's layout is to make it easier for users to find the content they are searching for, and the recommendations discussed in the previous section will help improve UT Austin's ability to connect those resources to students. During the research for this project however, it became apparent that UT Austin possesses a tool few other schools have, and if developed properly, it can make them a pioneer in security communication. That tool is the BeSafe campaign and its associated webpage.

Created in 2016 partly in response to the homicide of freshman Haruka Weiser, BeSafe is primarily an awareness campaign that uses social media and publications posted on campus to educate students on safe habits. One of the features on their website is a compilation of resources and services at UT Austin that guides users to the campus crime watch, the BCAL hotline, self-defense classes, and the voices against violence organization, just to name a few. The webpage unfortunately exhibits several of the design characteristics that also plagued the campus police department's website, such as extraneous amounts of text and poor prioritization of information. For example, a link to SURE Walk, one of UT Austin's best safety services, is the tenth of eighteen links posted on the site, and requires users to scroll most of the way down the page.

Out of all of the institutions surveyed, only one of them had a safety and crisis resource hub separate from their campus police department similar to how the BeSafe site is set up. This was somewhat surprising because by having a website serve as a central location for all campus resources, each of the connected organizations and services, including campus police, can target the scope of what they offer on their websites to better serve their constituents. To achieve this, BeSafe needs to collect and organize all of the safety resources that the university offers and form a guidance framework that gets students to the particular tool they need. Take the University of Illinois' sexual violence response page for example. Instead of overloading the user



with a myriad of links and services like the websites examined previously, they immediately engage the user by prompting them to input what they're looking for. Upon choosing an option, the user is then directed to a very specific set of resources for that particular problem.



**Figure 11:** *We Care website at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. This is a similar organization to UT Austin's Voices Against Violence.<sup>77</sup>*

This technique can be applied to all of the resources already on the BeSafe website by categorizing everything; maybe the first prompt would ask the user whether they are interested in safety training, learning more about the safety environment on campus, or need to respond to a crime. Users could then advance through levels of the website to find the resources that best fit their specific need. To make this system work effectively though, the BeSafe administrators would need to maintain an awareness of campus resources and keep the page up to date with the latest information.

A crucial component of social media strategy is creating a directory of all related social media accounts.<sup>78</sup> In addition to organizing resources and services, the BeSafe campaign can serve as this directory of media platforms to ensure that students are better able to engage with the channels that work best for them. Linking these accounts on one site or page also enhances

<sup>77</sup> We Care, 2018

<sup>78</sup> Chen, 2018

the customized messaging that was described in the previous section by forming a repository where any message is accessible, allowing them to complement each other.

One final way that the BeSafe campaign can change the way UT Austin educates its campus on crime and safety is by fostering more student engagement. As will be discussed in the following chapter, many of the perception issues that plague the campus are due to miscommunication between administration and students. This can be solved with the creation of a position or advisory board that actively engages student leaders to offer feedback, interface with the student body, and develop new ideas. There is already a precedence set from other student advisory positions on the tuition and budgeting committee, the president's student advisory council (PSAC), and others. Because it is run through the office of internal communications, BeSafe is already uniquely positioned at the intersection of UT Austin police, administration, parents, and students to create and manage such a resource. In doing so, they could help increase transparency with students while also opening up a new channel of evaluation for future improvements.

### Conclusions

Keeping 50,000 students and another 20,000 faculty adequately informed about their safety environment is no mean task, so in order to ensure that their messages are received by as many constituents as possible, UT Austin needs to optimize its channels of communication. One of the easiest improvements is to analyze the navigational and visual elements of the UTPD and BeSafe websites and adjust them to create a better user experience. On top of that, the university needs to target its messaging style based on the specific social media platform being used, and should also consider branching out into new services with large followings like Snapchat or YouTube. Finally, the school has a unique opportunity to create one of the first ever safety

resource hubs through the BeSafe campaign that would use design elements to efficiently guide students to services that can increase their physical and psychological safety.

## CHAPTER 5: TRANSPARENCY

Increasing access to information and improving communication will immediately benefit campus security, but to generate the most substantial gains, administration needs to increase its transparency with students. “The illusion of transparency is the tendency for individuals to overestimate the extent to which their internal states and intentions are apparent to an outside observer,” and from campus media, dialogue with students, and personal experience, this condition plagues the security efforts of UT Austin’s administration.<sup>79</sup> The effects are serious: despite maintaining one of the safest campuses of its size, the school comes under fire often for incidents that appear tone deaf or even deceptive, ultimately damaging the sense of security. Recent incidents include delays in alerts during the stabbing on May 1, 2017, failing to notify constituents about a student held at gunpoint on April 27, 2018, or the University’s failure to reveal domestic abuse charges leveraged against Professor Richard Morrisett in 2016.

Academic research generally breaks transparency into three categories: decision making transparency, policy information transparency, and policy outcome transparency.<sup>80</sup> Similar to the review of communication in the previous chapter, it is difficult to compare a school’s holistic performance in those categories because every university operates within a unique environment. Instead, a qualitative survey of successful techniques at other colleges can provide examples for improvement at UT Austin. Ultimately, transparency is achieved through establishing and maintaining a relationship of trust between authorities and constituents, so the following sections evaluate the tools through the lens of repairing and strengthening that relationship at UT Austin.

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<sup>79</sup> Garcia, 2002

<sup>80</sup> Grimmelikhuijsen & Welch, 2012

### Decision Making Transparency

The first component of transparency occurs through the decision making process. Research has shown that “communications adequacy is most strongly related to satisfaction with feedback. Similarly, involvement is most strongly correlated with perceived utilization.”<sup>81</sup> In a university setting, the trust between administration and students can erode when the decisions of the former are not understood or agreed with by the latter. This discrepancy forms pretty easily because communication is difficult and students are sensitive to their own needs, which creates a narrow minded view of the process. The responsibility for overcoming this gap falls on both parties, but from the survey of peer institutions, there are several ways that UT Austin’s administration specifically can improve their efforts at transparency.

From interviews with Dr. Garrard, Cindy Posey, Carlos Martinez, and other administrators at UT Austin, the general opinions of the student body are monitored through two channels. One is through the use of large scale surveys conducted by third party organizations that assess the entire campus environment with each study. While they are great at gathering lots of data and observing long term trends, these surveys are very informal and potentially overlook the specific concerns of smaller groups on campus. The other method for gathering feedback is through conversations with smaller groups, usually student leaders from the General Assembly or the Senate of College Councils. These interactions have the opposite problem of the surveys; they are very intimate conversations, but their narrow scope can allow the bias of certain groups to affect policy that will impact the entire student body.

A middle ground approach is needed, and the answer is twofold. The first is creating a less formal survey process; rather than forcing them to wait for campus wide surveys every couple of months, the University needs to make a channel available to students at all times.

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<sup>81</sup> Klein, Kraut, & Wolfson, 1971

Almost half of the universities surveyed through this research collect that feedback by posting comment forms on the front page of their police department websites. Surprisingly, UT Austin does not offer any survey options on the UTPD page, though there is a form available on the BeSafe website. Unfortunately, that form does not provide much useful information, and even more concerning is the fact that there is not infrastructure in place for storing and analyzing the information collected through the tool. Similarly, even complaints submitted via UT Austin's social media platforms are addressed as distinct events instead of being categorized or stored in a permanent repository. To create a transparent dialogue with students about the decision making process, administration needs to do a better job of creating better feedback channels, making them available to students, and ensuring the proper review and use of the data.

The other way to increase transparency in decision making is to include more student voices in the process. At UT Austin, there is already a precedence for this kind of relationship as students have seats on the tuition and budgeting advisory committee, the President's advisory committee, the University Unions board of directors, and many other influential bodies on campus. It is somewhat surprising then that there are no student ambassadors or advisory committees to contribute to the sensitive and significant issue of campus security. The primary concern with giving students that much power is allowing them access to sensitive security information. Despite that roadblock, the benefits of such a partnership and the feedback channels described previously include more innovative security initiatives, the creation of passionate ambassadors to the student body, and more effective administrative response to campus security concerns.

## Policy Information Transparency

The second area where UT Austin can start improving transparency is through security policy information. At first glance, this overlaps with the research on open information presented in chapter 3, but in reality, this actually concerns access to the operational procedures of entities like campus police or the campus safety and security committee. Providing access to this information is important because it creates a standard to compare performance against. Once a standard for campus security is established, it gives both administration and the student body the ability to gauge the effectiveness of the policies and provides a foundation for developing new initiatives.

“Strategic planning has demonstrated that it can be an effective tool for policy makers and managers, and that politics can drive many aspects of the process and its outcomes.”<sup>82</sup> One of the most established tools for organizational success is the strategic planning report, and there is already precedence for creating them for security organizations. Many campus police departments, for example, maintain and publish one, such as the University of Wisconsin’s police department.<sup>83</sup> Several other schools surveyed, including the University of Illinois’ police department keep their own strategic plans as well. Content in the documents range from staffing plans to strategic priorities to goals for future performance. Even departments internal to the University of Texas at Austin create their own strategic plans, such as the one developed by the campus master planning committee. Obviously, the development of an architectural plan and a security plan entail very different processes, but having that experience already available on campus could greatly expedite the task.

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<sup>82</sup> Hendrick, 2010

<sup>83</sup> Strategic Plan 2017-2021, 2017

A factor working in UT Austin's favor is that in the aftermath of the Haruka Weiser homicide in 2016, the Texas Department of Public Safety was contracted to do a full security analysis of the school's campus. At the conclusion of the survey, the DPS provided a series of weaknesses and areas for improvement, and helped the university prioritize their initiatives moving forward. Most of that information is sensitive and cannot be released to the public, but administration has already chosen to release some of the takeaways from the report through on the BeSafe website. With a lot of goal setting and planning already taken care of thanks to this study, it should not be difficult to supplement the work that has already been done with internal goals and plans to post online.

### Policy Outcome Transparency

The final area of improvement at UT Austin is better transparency in policy outcomes. Achievement and improvement strengthens the relationship of trust between students and administration, and by establishing how the University is performing compared to the standards established through policy information, they can capitalize on their accomplishments while mitigating the consequences of their failures. For students, having administrative self-evaluations available not only reinforces confidence in their decision making but also gives them the opportunity to make educated choices and critiques regarding future security initiatives.

*“Performance analysis offers a number of advantages for evaluating customer acceptance of a marketing program [. . .] that can yield important insights into which aspect of the marketing mix a firm should devote more attention as well as identify areas that may be consuming too many resources.”<sup>84</sup>*

While performance analysis is a common practice within university departments, the schools are generally hesitant to publish the results for fear of backlash or negative publicity. For a school as safe as UT Austin however, publishing results should be encouraged both for the value to


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<sup>84</sup> Martilla & James, 1977



students as well as the potential public relations benefits. Over 20% of the peer institutions engage in some sort of performance analysis with the two most popular methods being annual reports and statistical comparisons.

Annual reports are the complimentary resource to a strategic plan and often review performance through a variety of lenses. For example, the University of Wisconsin's police department annual report contains qualitative sections that cover current and future goals, then it moves into quantitative data that breaks down the crime statistics recorded on the campus.



UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON  
POLICE DEPARTMENT  
**2016 ANNUAL  
REPORT**

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**Figure 12:** *University of Wisconsin's Police Department annual report.*<sup>85</sup>

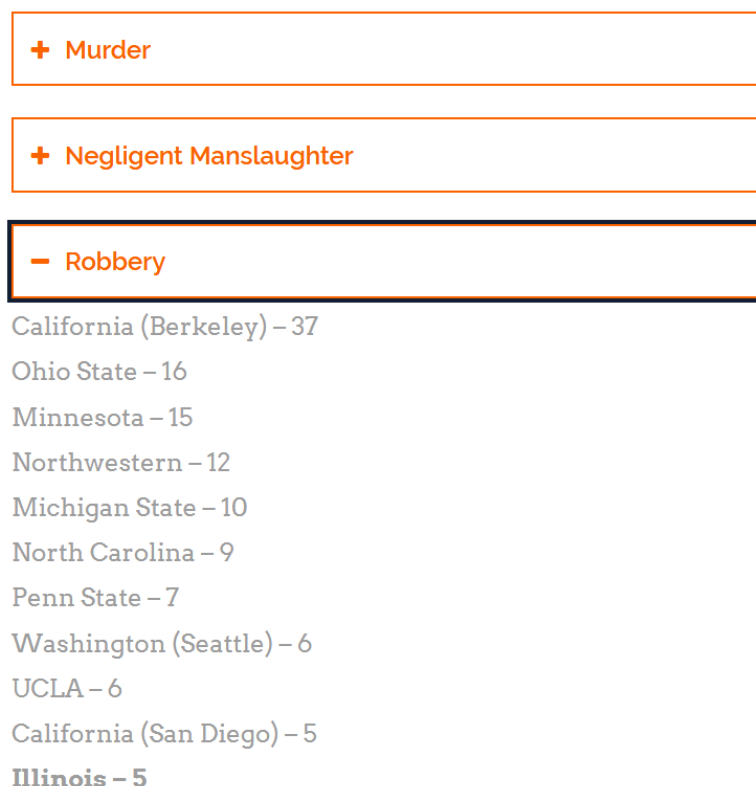
By reporting the data, the agency provides constituents with an easy to interpret guide to the annual performance. These reports are also great places to provide comments and justifications for actions that were taken of the course of the year that can mitigate the backlash over certain results.

While reporting results is an important first step, transparency is greatly enhanced when those results are broken down and compared with external standards. This kind of data analysis is not time consuming but it can greatly enhance the usefulness of the information for the user.

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<sup>85</sup> 2016 Annual Report, 2016

One example is the comparison reporting at the University of Illinois. On their police department website, they have generated their own set of peer institutions and compare their four year performance against that sample set for each of the Clery crime categories. UT Austin was included as one of the schools on the list and compared well against the others, indicating that this kind of reporting might be a positive public relations tool.

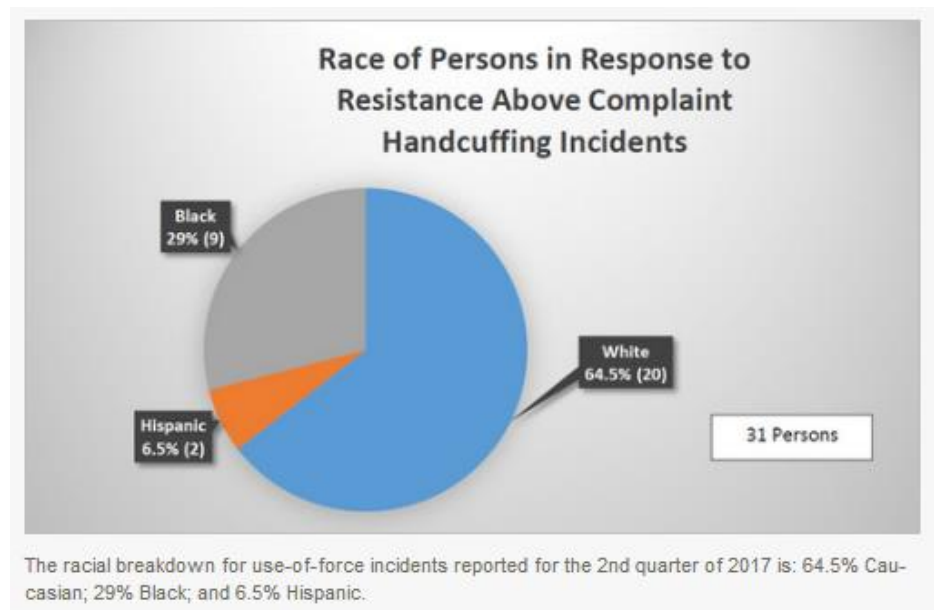


**Figure 13:** Comparison reporting from the University of Illinois. This section shows how the school compares to peer institutions in robberies over the last four years. UT Austin was included on this list and compared favorably with only four robberies.<sup>86</sup>

Other schools took crime data to the next step by introducing previously unavailable information and putting the results into a visual format. This type of reporting increases transparency both by providing access to more detailed information but also by publishing it in a palatable format that

<sup>86</sup> How We Compare, 2018

improves reader comprehension. This is one example from the University of Wisconsin that shows race statistics for all perpetrators that were handcuffed during 2016.



**Figure 14:** *The University of Wisconsin breaks down certain statistics based on the race of the subject to be more transparent about perceived racial bias.<sup>87</sup>*

It is up to the administration to determine what kind of information to release in this manner, but the analysis process is not a significant constraint while the benefits are numerous.

### Conclusions

Transparency is dependent on communication, but a very different style than the one focused on in the previous chapter. Instead of centering on stylistic components, it is concerned with compiling and reporting information to make it easily accessible to constituents. This is especially important for university security agencies because failing to adequately educate students about their environment and the policies controlling it can directly impact their academic performance. Many of the measures introduced in this chapter are relatively simple to implement; strategy plans and annual reports require time to compile and format, but compared

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<sup>87</sup> Use of Force Data, 2018

to the hours spent on crime prevention, it is an insignificant commitment. Other suggestions, like creating a student advisory channel or soliciting student feedback, take a little more sacrifice because they introduce more components to an already complex system. The most important takeaway here however, is that in the face of ever higher scrutiny and dissatisfaction, UT Austin's security administration needs to evaluate their methods for engaging and including the student body, then make changes accordingly. The status quo clearly is not sufficient and needs to improve.

## CHAPTER 6: RECOMMENDATIONS

This research began by explaining the importance of creating an informed community to improve campus security. Through the resulting analysis, the University of Texas at Austin's performance at creating that environment was evaluated through their control of information, the ways they communicated it, and their ability to self-evaluate. Numerous problems were uncovered through the investigation that offer improvement opportunities to improve safety on the school's campus.

### Recommendations

To guide future action, the results collected through this research have informed a set of recommendations that can be organized into two sets or options. The first list contains all of the suggestions that are easy to implement but will produce significant results almost immediately. With low amounts of resources and energy, the university can apply these solutions to make quick strides towards improving student safety. The second set of recommendations encompasses the ideas that require more effort to implement but add higher value. If the university is committed to achieving its stated aim of becoming recognized as a national leader for campus safety, these are the actions that will make that happen.

**Immediate Results Approach:** Based on this research, it appears that achieving immediate results entails a four step approach, starting with updating available information. Much of the detail contained on the UTPD website is very out of date, which can lead to ignorant or misinformed constituents. For example, the Clery report, campus crime log, and campus crime statistics should all reflect the most recent information available but all of the most recent statistical reports are months to years old. Additionally, the news feed linked within the BeSafe website was last posted to in March of 2017 and should contain more recent stories. In addition

to updating available information, administration should work to create systems or processes to ensure the recency of website content. These changes should be combined with simple contextualizing tools such as a dictionary of terms, more description of the Clery act, explanation of state laws, or visual representations of UT Austin's Clery geography to ultimately boost transparency and comprehension of campus crime statistics.

The second recommendation to create immediate results is increase the transparency between security personnel and students. In the current format, the primary channels between students and administration are the Daily Texan, social media, emails, and limited meetings with student leaders. While this might be adequate from the administrative side, students are often left dissatisfied or confused. Whether they simply do not understand the administrative considerations taken into account or have legitimate concerns with a certain behavior, creating a better channel of communication can improve transparency and alleviate some of the stress between the two parties. By sponsoring panels with students, releasing summaries of climate and safety meetings, or recording messages of security personnel providing context for tumultuous events on campus, administration can more effectively demonstrate the complexity of their decision making process and the energy that they tackle student concerns with, ultimately repairing and strengthening the relationship between the two parties.

In conjunction with updating web content and bridging the gap with students, another step that will quickly improve security on campus is connecting virtual resources in a more effective manner. UT Austin has already created the foundation for an online security hub with the BeSafe campaign, but the program can maximize its effectiveness by connecting to more resources and enhancing the navigational and visual elements. Two examples of quick improvements would be creating icons for SURE Walk and campus alerts and indicating their

importance by making them the first features to appear on the UTPD and BeSafe website. No university surveyed currently operates an online crisis resource hub, so by adding these features to the BeSafe website, UT Austin would pioneer a new technique for improving campus security and could form a model for other schools across the country.

The final recommendation in the ‘immediate results’ approach is to review all of the information currently available to the public and assess the impact of releasing more details on campus security. Based on the analysis in chapter 3, UT Austin currently takes a relatively minimalist approach when it comes to providing information on campus crime, but based on what is available at peer institutions, it appears that UT Austin can increase that selection with limited repercussions both from the legal and public relations standpoint. UT Austin can accomplish this goal by following the example of other schools and publishing the names of sex offenders employed or enrolled at the school, adding more details to its campus crime log, or comparing UT Austin’s performance in campus safety with other schools. Making more information available will not only empower students to make safer choices for themselves, but can also boost the public perception of the school by objectively demonstrating how it compares with similar institutions.

The common themes that connects the four recommendations of the ‘immediate results’ approach are transparency and accessibility. As discussed in chapters 1 and 2, campus security can be threatened as much by student perceptions as it can be by physical threats. By targeting these perception issues through better data content and bridging the gap between students and administration, the university can greatly reduce the impact those feelings have on the student body.

**National Leader Approach:** While the previous approach is useful for quickly improving campus security to a level with many of UT Austin's peers, it alone cannot accomplish the school's stated goal of being recognized as a national leader for campus safety. To reach that level will require significant commitment of both time and resources, but with the understanding that those must be balanced with other needs, four initiatives should be targeted above others to add the most value to campus security.

The first area of focus needs to be publishing data in more open formats. As a tier 1 research institution, UT Austin understands the importance of academic research as a driver for positive social change, but the manner in which it offers local crime statistics inhibits future additional study. The problem can be solved simply by guiding the public to resources like the Department of Education's campus safety data cutter tool,<sup>88</sup> but if the university is truly committed to growth, it will take steps like posting data in .csv format, making campus crime logs searchable, and connecting researchers to national repositories on the subject.

The second area of focus should be adding visual content to the UTPD and BeSafe websites. Based on what other schools are doing around the country, it is clear that simple data analysis tools can go a long way towards making information more palatable and comprehensible for its end users. Many tools currently exist to aide in visual analysis ranging from the simple charts and graphs available in Microsoft Excel to advanced services like the one offered by crimemapping.com that can plot crime data onto a campus map and adjust the results based on the desired chronology. It might not be feasible to convert all of the data into visual representations, so it would be up to the university to work with students to assess which

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<sup>88</sup> Campus Safety and Security, 2018



analyses would be most useful to them, then work to implement those and, just as importantly, keep them updated.

Potentially the most difficult recommendation to implement is to build on the transparency techniques described in the previous approach by incorporating students in administrative side of campus security. As evident from the behavior of the student body, many people are very passionate about this issue but do not always have the proper outlets to constructively contribute their ideas. Consequently, UT Austin should seriously consider creating a student advisory committee that can both introduce innovation to the security infrastructure while also giving the students a much needed channel to directly communicate with administration about these issues. There is precedent for this sort of student involvement as students sit on advisory boards for the Texas Unions, the tuition and budgeting committee, and the center for mental health counseling. Other ways to achieve similar effects is to create a student ambassador program for UTPD or to host panels with campus security leadership. One of the biggest problems impacting UT Austin's ability to effectively ensure campus safety is discontent with the current environment from the student body. By sacrificing some power to the students, administration can mend that relationship and invest the student body in the issue.

The final step to become a pioneer in campus safety is to unite and enhance the social media of UT Austin's safety infrastructure. This starts by making clear strategies for each platform currently in use to maximize the effectiveness of the messages sent across them. Once those are operating in unison, the university should explore alternative platforms like YouTube or snapchat to supplement the standard ones already in use. Many schools are finding innovative ways to engage students through social media, and since UT Austin already maintains such a large following, there is a lot of opportunity to spread information and education to students.

Enhancing the social media strategy is also an opportunity to build on the previous recommendation and give students a better forum to share their thoughts and ideas on campus security. Ultimately, these adjustments can help the university overcome the limited attention span of students and give them an opportunity to do some of the work of engaging their peers.

It is important to note that the approaches and recommendations suggested are by no means exhaustive, nor are they perfectly adjusted for the unique environment at UT Austin. Instead, they are intended to be guiding principles based on available information and a limited amount of interaction with campus administration. More than anything, it is important for the university to recognize the impact information and transparency has on student security and conduct their own analysis.

### Limitations

The lack of quantitative information available on this subject was alluded to early in this study, and consequently, research was done in a somewhat informal manner to provide readers with a general understanding of and intuition for the subject. As the importance and urgency of campus security continues to increase, there are numerous topics that should be explored further to inspire and inform future research and development.

Chief among these is the availability of college crime statistics. The Clery Act sets the standard for what universities are obligated to share with the public, but it fails to provide the framework for taking that information to the next level. Most Clery report statistics are nearly impossible to digest and campus crime reports rarely appear in formats other than pdf. In most cases, that data is already being stored in more useful formats, so colleges should choose to provide them in those formats to assist in research efforts. Additionally, the usefulness of the data is hindered by the how little context is required by the Clery reports. If universities are

serious about this issue, they should start contributing more than their minimum reporting requirements. To balance that sacrifice, researchers need to increase their engagement in the subject to contribute meaningful insights.

Another void in research regarding college campuses is the behavior and perceptions of students. Some of the challenge stems from the constantly changing nature of the subjects, but to adequately analyze the economic feasibility of new techniques or services, it is crucial to have some understanding for how students will react. This discrepancy severely impacted this research specifically, as the value of recommendations had to be based on perceived benefits, similar services offered elsewhere, or analogous practices in other areas like mental health or student government. Part of the blame for this dearth of information lies with students; universities and organizations across the country work hard to produce meaningful surveys and research methods to investigate student behavior but do not achieve the level of student engagement necessary to glean statistically significant results, leaving them open to inconsistency or bias. To overcome this effect, research entities need to start assessing both the way they market their surveys to students and how they incentivize students to participate in them.

Yet another factor that limited this study was the complexity of the collegiate environment, especially at an institution as diverse as the University of Texas at Austin. Despite the openness of administrators, it was often difficult to connect with the right people or assess all of factors affecting a research question. Similar to the research challenges presented by the fickle nature of students, complex administrative structures are a factor that needs to be accounted for in future studies.

### Future Research

Because of the limitations, this research set the foundation for future research as much as it established actionable results. For the University of Texas at Austin, it defined three categories for improving campus security and compared the school's performance in them with peer institutions. To develop this analysis even further, the university should set up a framework to ascertain the results of this study and survey its current set of resources to determine if anything is difficult to use or was simply overlooked. Additionally, administration needs to work with student leaders to gauge the biggest areas of improvement in the eyes of students and start assigning economic values to the different initiatives.

If UT Austin can assert itself as a pioneer in campus security, the school will serve as an example for similar institutions, whether collegiate or corporate. Research on the subject can continue to push the boundaries by exploring the contributing factors to student safety on dissimilar campuses like private or rural universities. The ultimate goal in this field should be optimizing the security infrastructure at campuses across the country by customized sets of initiatives whose effectiveness has been validated for that specific environment.

This foundation set by this research can continue to impact the country outside of the college environment as well. The literature surveyed during this study supported the idea of perceptions affecting security as well as the benefits of informed communities, but both of those concepts need to be developed further to inform law enforcement and government policy in communities across the country. When it comes to safety, most people prefer tangible changes, but if a stronger link between information and security can be established, it can shape the national dialogue, eventually affecting the lives of every citizen.

## Conclusion

This project, inspired by personal experience during four years at the University of Texas at Austin, initially sought to explore technology and how it could improve campus security, but based on the input of both students and administrators, the focus shifted to the concept of an informed community. Academic research supports the value of educating constituents about the security environment they reside in and how to cope with it, but the topic rarely gets broached in the context of college campuses.

Limited by the amount of data available, this study sought to investigate ways that the University of Texas at Austin could improve its ability to keep its student body informed, and thereby increase their physical and psychological safety. The concept was pursued from three different angles, information, communication, and evaluation, through methods ranging from analyzing peer institutions to conducting interviews with administration to supplementing those results with academic research. Ultimately, the study found numerous areas where the university was failing to support an informed community, and, despite being a one of the safest colleges of its size in America, these deficiencies contributed to a lack of transparency between students and administration, and ultimately created perceptions of an insecure campus.

These results were then compiled and developed into a series of recommendations that can not only improve UT Austin's ability to keep its students informed about their security environment, but establish the school as a national leader in campus safety. Moving forward, the university should continue assessing the recommendations presented and work to implement them in a manner that meets the needs of both the administration and the student body. Ultimately, this work can be used as both a foundation and inspiration for future study into a topic that deserves significantly more energy and focus.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael Durbin Black III (Trey) is a native Austinite and has been a passionate Longhorn for 22 years. While pursuing his Eagle Scout award in high school, he developed a love for adventure and the outdoors that has followed him to college. Unsatisfied with limitations in his engineering curriculum, he has enjoyed combining his technical interests with the diversity of the Plan II program, and that helped create a passion for the intersections of technology and society. Upon graduation, Trey will be joining Accenture as a management consultant in their San Francisco office, but ultimately envisions himself pursuing social entrepreneurship.

